

September 2002



School Health Connections

School Health Connections is an interdepartmental program between the California Department of Health Services and the California Department of Education dedicated to improving the health and academic success of children and youth. This is accomplished through a coordinated school health system that combines health education, health promotion, disease prevention and access to health-related services in an integrated manner.

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California Department of Health Services

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Outreach in Action

CONNECTING KIDS TO HEALTH CARE

MEETING THE CHALLENGE... THE STORY OF A SCHOOL NURSE

Her nursing career started on the battlefields of Vietnam.

Meredith Meals, now the coordinator of health services at Centralia Elementary School in Orange County, witnessed firsthand suffering, damaged and infected limbs and death—"enough to last me forever." She was married soon after her return to a physician she had met in Vietnam while entertaining the troops with the musical "South Pacific." Sam had played the lead opposite Meals in the play.

Their first son Allen was born with a congenital cardiac defect. He would be in his mid-thirties now if he had survived his second surgery at the age of five. What Meals remembers from that time is the care given by her "dear friend Sheila, a teacher, who prepared days and days of projects for Allen to do in the hospital."

When Meals went back to work, she decided to utilize her degrees in nursing. She realized that she wanted to offer health care to children as well as teach them, "using innovative ideas about health, from my heart, like Sheila had done for me and my son Allen. School nursing was the perfect match for me."

"Parents need to understand that insurance is not just a crisis thing but is maintenance and prevention."

—Meredith Meals, School Nurse

AWARD WINNING SCHOOL NURSE

Meals' career choice led to her eventual designation as 1987 National School Nurse of the Year. She had won the state title earlier. Meals was recently named Orange County

School Nurse Coordinator of the Year. Much of the accolades for her work as a school nurse are based upon the enormous amount of work she does with puppetry and music.

"I have my puppet 'Kingdom of Healthy Habits.' The Prince deals with dental care, the Princess with nutrition, and right on down the line. 'Bruce Learns About

Asthma' is designed to teach children about the unique differences of an asthmatic child."

GETTING THE WORD OUT

Primary among Meals' goals as a school nurse is to make sure that parents know about affordable health insurance options for children. "School nurses are a powerful resource when it comes to getting health insurance information out to families. They can also show parents the broad implications of health care coverage and how to utilize it.

One of our major roles is to help parents traverse the complex medical scene. They need to understand that insurance is not just a crisis thing but is maintenance and prevention."

In Orange County, distributing information on Healthy Families and Medi-Cal is a high priority for school nurses. "We've had an enormous response to sending health care coverage material out through the Free and Reduced Price Meal program. We are putting energy into refining and improving the flyers that go out so that parents find this to be an easy and relatively effortless thing to do."

(Cont. on page 3)



The coordinated school health approach embraces the link between health and education. It contains eight essential components, with the ultimate goal being to fulfill young people's over-all health* needs so that students can be in the classroom and learning.

The eight-component model involves the entire school system, home and community working in a coordinated way to support the health of young people in a school setting and

to eliminate duplication and gaps. Resources and energy are strengthened in this coordinated, concentrated effort.

The result is a cohesive team that has a sum greater than its parts, working to benefit the health and well-being of students.

**The term "health" is used in the broadest sense. Health is much more than simply the absence of disease; health involves optimal physical, mental, social, and emotional functioning and well-being.*

—World Health Organization, 1996

HEALTH EDUCATION

Classroom instruction that addresses the physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions of health.



HEALTH SERVICES

Preventive services, education, emergency care, referral and management of acute and chronic health conditions to ensure health of students.



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Partnerships among schools, parents and community groups to maximize resources and expertise in supporting the health of young people.



PSYCHOLOGICAL AND COUNSELING SERVICES

Activities that focus on cognitive, emotional, behavioral and social needs in the school and home.



THE 8 COMPONENTS OF COORDINATED SCHOOL HEALTH

HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The school's physical, emotional and social climate, providing a safe physical plant and a healthy, supportive environment for learning.



HEALTH PROMOTION FOR STAFF

Assessment, education and wellness activities for school faculty and staff.



NUTRITION SERVICES

Reinforcement of classroom-based nutrition education, promotion of healthy eating behaviors and integration of nutritious, affordable and appealing meals.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

School-based instructional program that provides students with the skills, knowledge, attitudes and confidence to be physically active for life.



CALIFORNIA SCHOOL NURSES ORGANIZATION: A Healthy Child is a Better Learner

If you have kids in school who are ill or who can't see or hear, they can't achieve. What school nurses do, or don't do, in terms of health affects young people academically," says Barbara Hankins, president of the California School Nurses Organization (CSNO), a 1500-member group formed in 1950.

A district nurse working in the Colusa Unified School District located in Northern California, Hankins is enthusiastic about CSNO's service to school nurses. "It's an isolated job school nurses have. We're autonomous and make a lot of decisions on our own. CSNO offers a networking and support system for nurses."

CSNO is divided into five geographical sections in California. Sectional and state meetings bring nurses together in a learning situation that includes educational workshops and speakers.

SCHOOL NURSES HIGHLY TRAINED

A school nurse must be a qualified registered nurse with a baccalaureate degree in nursing or a related field, at least one year of study beyond that and two years of school nurse practice.

"We see things holistically," says Hankins. "Our training includes child development, mental health and communication. We deal with an amazing array of people: parents, staff, children, administrators, all ages, all ethnicities. We are the 'safe person to talk to' for many people."

Hankins says that being a school nurse involves much more than bandages and head lice. "The stereotype is that a school nurse sits in the office just waiting for a student to come in with a scraped knee. The fact of the matter is we aren't even in an office many times. I work in a county with 4,500 students and our nurses rotate from site to site. But that's better than

being responsible for 9,000 children, as some nurses are."

She says that school nurses are strongly supportive of affordable health care coverage programs. "One of the biggest frustrations to me as a school nurse is to know that a child needs care, and their parents cannot find or afford a provider. School nurses are in an ideal place to educate families about affordable health care coverage and assist them in accessing it."

"School nurses are in an ideal position to educate families about affordable health care coverage."

—Barbara Hankins,
CSNO President

Hankins is a great advocate of Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Families. "It is so nice to have another option for families who have 'fallen through the cracks' for so long. I have seen students come to school with new glasses, with new treatment for their asthma, or other treatment for a condition that has been chronic and impacting their education."

The National School Nurses Association's recommended ratio of school nurse to pupil is one nurse for every 750 pupils. California's ratio is one nurse for every 2,450 pupils.

These statistics show a shortage of school nurses in California. "Our state organization has actually hired a public relations firm to get the word out so we can attract more nurses," says Hankins. "We're doing a massive outreach and trying

to make it easier for potential school nurses to get the necessary education to qualify them to work. We have to appeal to a more diverse population, including men. We're trying to bring men a new perspective."

Hankins acknowledges that school nurses fight an uphill battle. "But the point is, we're going to keep fighting the good fight. With most of us, being a school nurse is a passion. We make a difference in the life of a child."

(MEETING THE CHALLENGE... Continued from page 1)

THE SCHOOL NURSE'S ROLE

Meals also serves as the project coordinator for Centralia Healthy Start Project WISHES. She believes that "Healthy Start centers are invaluable. They address family issues like health access, immigration, legal aid, family and child counseling and the need for clothing, food or shelter. Healthy Start links families to community services. That's one of the traditional roles of the nurse: to access services for the family. We try to find alternative ways to make services available for families. We look for funding and write grants to increase our effectiveness."

A school nurse's job is never done. Sometimes it seems overwhelming, but Meals is very clear about where she's headed and what she sees as her mission.

"I want to see children growing up to be adults who are making good health decisions on their own. School nurses are needed to do this—working in schools where accurate information is foremost and in terminology appropriate to students."

You are free to copy the 'Healthy Families/ Medi-Cal for Families Eligibility and Benefits' insert in this month's newsletter. It is designed for parents. It can be sent home from school in newsletters, distributed at health events or parent nights and used for parent-teacher conferences.





SCHOOL NURSES SPEAK OUT

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU DO TO ENROLL OR RETAIN CHILDREN IN AFFORDABLE HEALTH CARE COVERAGE PROGRAMS?



"I connect with parents through teachers, secretaries, other parents and outreach programs like Healthy Start. Thirty percent of our students are Spanish-speaking, and I am bilingual/bicultural. That helps! I get the school staff involved in enrollment. Teachers refer the families to me that they know are not insured.

Community networking is very important. I stay in touch with county public health nurses and stay current on community resources so that I can better help the high-risk, uninsured families at my school."

—**Tish Widemann, RN, MSN, Vacaville Unified School District**

"We have an enrollment specialist on site in our school district. We get publicity to local staff and community centers making her availability known. She has been wonderful about getting out to parent meetings, health fairs and assemblies. Enrollment is occurring daily for our students."

—**Wanda Wong, RN, Santa Clara Unified School District**



"I emphasize the importance of health coverage for children, whether they are ill or injured or not. I work at a very culturally diverse school and many cultures are unaware of the benefits of preventive health coverage. There are many fears regarding Immigration and Naturalization Services and other information being shared. I try to answer questions and alleviate their fears. I also refer parents, when necessary, to a school district enrollment worker who speaks Spanish. Educating, decreasing fears and gaining trust are essential."

—**Donna Magden, RN, MSN, San Diego Unified School District**

"I ask parents and caregivers whether they have health care coverage for their children whenever I talk with them. Even if the emergency card indicates that they have health insurance, I ask about health care coverage as there may have been lay-offs or other employment changes.

I give the families enrollment information and ask that they share it with other families and friends. I find that this direct contact is more likely to lead to families enrolling. Teachers, school secretaries, other support staff and school volunteers are great at identifying families that need health care coverage if they know that the school nurse can help families with this need."

—**Susan Kitazawa, RN, San Francisco Unified School District**



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HEALTHY FAMILIES & MEDI-CAL FOR FAMILIES

Get complete medical, dental and vision coverage
for children up to age 19.

TOLL-FREE INFORMATION
1-888-747-1222

BENEFITS:

- Regular checkups (including well-child checkups)
- Immunizations
- Prescription medicine
- Lab and x-rays
- Dental and eye care (including eyeglasses)
- Mental health and substance abuse services
- Physician and hospital services

ELIGIBILITY:

- Determined by family income, size and age of the child
- Covers children from birth up to age 19
- Available to U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals and qualified immigrant children regardless of date of entry (a child may qualify for some form of Medi-Cal, regardless of immigration status).

All information is confidential.



Short, easy mail-in application—
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- \$5 co-payment for non-preventive services such as illness.
- Monthly premiums from \$4 to \$9 per child per month to a maximum of \$27 for all children in the family.
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MEDI-CAL FOR FAMILIES

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- No monthly premiums.
- No co-payments for any benefit.

TOLL-FREE INFORMATION
1-888-747-1222

www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov

WORKING FAMILIES QUALIFY!

**A family of four can make
up to \$3,771 a month.**

Healthy Families	Medi-Cal
\$4 – \$9 per month per child All children in family, \$27 a month	\$0

**You choose your doctor
and health plan!**

**You can get free help
completing the application.**

Other options are available for children
who do not qualify for Healthy Families or
Medi-Cal for Families

Kaiser Permanente Care for Kids*
1-800-255-5053

California Kids* (for undocumented children)
1-800-374-4KID

*Not affiliated with or endorsed by the State of California.
Eligibility is based on family size and income.

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HEALTHY FAMILIES & MEDI-CAL FOR FAMILIES

Obtenga cobertura médica, dental y de la vista completa para niños hasta los 19 años de edad

Información gratis llamando al
1-888-747-1222

BENEFICIOS:

- Chequeos regulares de salud (incluso los chequeos preventivos para niños).
- Vacunas.
- Medicamentos recetados.
- Servicios de laboratorio y rayos-x.
- Atención dental y de la vista (incluso anteojos).
- Servicios para la salud mental y abuso de drogas y alcohol.
- Servicios de doctor y hospital.

ELEGIBILIDAD:

- Se determina por el ingreso y tamaño familiar y la edad del niño.
 - Cubre a niños hasta los 19 años de edad.
 - Disponible para ciudadanos y nacionales de Estados Unidos, y niños inmigrantes calificados sin importar la fecha de entrada (un niño puede calificar para recibir beneficios limitados de Medi-Cal sin importar su estado inmigratorio).
- Toda información es confidencial.



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Disponible en 11 idiomas

HEALTHY FAMILIES

- No hay copagos por servicios preventivos, tal como vacunas.
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- Selección de planes de salud de cobertura de salud médica, dental y de la vista.

MEDI-CAL FOR FAMILIES

- Cobertura sin costo.
- No hay primas mensuales.
- No hay copagos por beneficios.

Información gratis llamando al
1-888-747-1222

www.healthyfamilies.ca.gov

¡Las familias con ingresos califican!

Una familia de 4 con un ingreso hasta \$3,771 por mes

Healthy Families	Medi-Cal
\$4 – \$9 por mes por niño Todos los niños en la familia por \$27 por mes	\$0

¡Usted escoge su propio doctor y plan de salud!

Obtenga asistencia gratis para completar la solicitud.

Hay otras opciones disponibles para niños que no califican para Healthy Families o Medi-Cal for Families

Kaiser Permanente Care for Kids®
1-800-255-5053

California Kids* (para niños indocumentados)
1-800-374-4KID

*No están afiliados ni sancionados por el Estado de California. La elegibilidad se basa en el tamaño e ingreso de la familia.

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